Dangerous Nation Roundtable *Review*

Reviewed Work:

Robert Kagan. *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20th Century.* New York: Knopf, 2006.

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux
Reviewers: James E. Lewis, Jr., Frederick W. Marks III, William Weeks

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h-diplo **ROUNDTABLE** *Review*

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

If you went into U.S. Diplomatic History in the 1960s, you probably received thorough training from the origins of American diplomacy in the revolution to the Cold War. Early on you encountered Samuel Flagg Bemis and learned the meaning of archival research and the study of the exchange of official notes, demarches, and policy making in the offices of new U.S. officials and British leaders. You learned to skim your way through monographs on *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, *Jay's Treaty*, *Pinckney's Treaty,* which received the Pulitzer Prize, *The Latin American Policy of the United States*, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, which earned a second Pulitzer Prize, and *The Latin American Policy of the United States*. Bemis also edited *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy (18 vols., 1963-72)*. You may have taught your first course in U.S. diplomacy with Bemis' *A Diplomatic History of the United States*.

Despite the quality of Bemis' scholarship, students probably welcomed a shift to Thomas Bailey's *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (1940-1980, 10th edition). Amazon still has copies of various editions ranging in price from $9 to $180. Bailey turned out a number of monographs and several, like his classic text, shifted away from the Bemis emphasis on the diplomatic exchanges between governments to focus on the role of public opinion in the formation and implementation of foreign policy.

Bailey 's text achieved dominance in the field although a number of scholars offered both diplomatic textbooks, such as Richard Leopold's *The Growth of American Foreign Policy* (1964) and Robert Ferrell's *American Diplomacy: A History* (1969), and interpretive studies such as Richard W. Van Alstyne's *The Rising American Empire* (1960) which discussed the emergence of a conception of American empire out of the 18th century European imperial struggle for dominance. Van Alstyne explored its development through continental expansion and into insular imperialism in the Caribbean and Pacific. After retiring from Harvard in 1957, Frederick Merk also contributed a series of books on expansion in the in the 1830s and 1840s as well as an influential thematic study of *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History; A Reinterpretation* (1963).

The arrival of revisionists led by William A. Williams redirected the focus of diplomatic history even further to internal sources shaping continental expansion and them overseas market aspirations, and the Open Door perspective. Two major interpretative challenges from Williams and his students appeared in 1972-1973; Williams' edited *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations*, and Lloyd C. Gardner, Walter F. LaFeber, and Thomas J. McCormick produced *Creation of the American Empire: U.S. Diplomatic History*. Expansion as a central objective in U.S. diplomacy had been explored previously, but the emphasis on domestic sources shaping U.S. policy went far beyond Bailey's emphasis on public opinion and placed economic considerations from land to markets as dominant factors.

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Several recent interpretive studies in *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* have continued the traditions established by Bemis, Bailey and Williams. In *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865*, Bradford Perkins broadens his familiar focus on Anglo-American relations to explore major themes of territorial expansionism, crusading republicanism, and commercial trade desires. Perkins' applies a Bemis-like approach to present what American diplomats and their foreign counterparts are doing, and to offer praise and blame on these leaders and their policies. By contrast in the second volume, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, and in *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750*, Walter LaFeber emphasizes the Williams' perspective on the transforming impact of economic considerations, most notably the industrial process of the last 19th century and its demand for markets for goods and outlets for investments as a dominant consideration with American policymakers over other external and internal forces.

So what is Robert Kagan thinking when he moves into this territory with the first of a projected two-volume study of American foreign policy? Kagan started his study ten years ago and completed a Ph.D. at American University in 2005 with a dissertation entitled "The Sources of American Conduct in International Affairs." Robert Beisner, author of *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900* (2nd ed., 1986) among other works, directed the dissertation so Kagan had very good training.

H-Diplo members may also wish to consult David M. Kennedy's review in *The Washington Post*, Sunday, October 29, 2006, and Edmund S. Morgan's "Inventing the 'Liberal Republican' Mind," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 53, No. 18 (November 16, 2006).

Some of the issues raised by Kagan's study and the commentators include

1. What is the relationship of Kagan's approach to earlier studies mentioned above? This is not a Bemis or a Perkins' diplomatic history. Many of the classic confrontations, negotiations, and treaties receive only passing attention. For example, the War of 1812 is discussed most directly on pp. 144-152, but Kagan's emphasis is more on the domestic sources and consequences of the conflict rather than the issues and negotiations leading up to the conflict or the negotiations at Ghent to end the war.

2. Kagan focuses on internal sources shaping American attitudes and policies, most notably the "insatiable desire for territory and dominant influence," the revolution's unleashing of an ideology and liberal, commercial society, and the evolving conflict among American leaders and their parties over appropriate foreign policies from the Federalist-Jeffersonian response to the French Revolution and ensuing European wars, to the challenge of the Cuban independence movement at the end of the 19th century. Thus, Kagan shares a domestic orientation with the revisionists and emphasis on territorial expansion but gives considerably less weight to Williams' open door thesis and the search for markets.

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3. Kagan clearly rejects the classic view of George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796 as a statement of isolationism. In reviewing the issue, Kagan does not directly engage the historiography from Bemis' view of the address as a statement of independence aimed at British and French meddling, to Alexander DeConde's stress on the domestic political conflict between the Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans, to Felix Gilbert's emphasis on the influence of European ideas about foreign policy mixed with Washington's and Alexander Hamilton's experiences and interests, to Burton Kaufman's and the revisionist emphasis on the address as a strategy for expansion and empire. Instead, Kagan emphasizes the importance of the domestic context and the ideological differences between Thomas Jefferson and Hamilton on the meaning of republicanism which shaped their different views on foreign policy.

4. This is also the case with the Monroe Doctrine. Kagan devotes considerable attention to the origins of the doctrine and the interaction among Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, President James Monroe, and Henry Clay over the formulation and application of the doctrine on specific issues such as the revolution in Greece against the Turkish sultan. Kagan suggests that JQA was keeping expansionist options open whereas Monroe emphasized ideological distinctions and considered the doctrine a "statement of international republican solidarity."

5. So is the United States a dangerous nation, as Kagan's title suggests? Kagan emphasizes the alarming impact of American territorial expansion on Indian tribes and the European powers as well as the troubling impact of American revolutionary ideology and liberal society. The American self-image, however, Kagan views as lacking self-awareness on this threat and, instead, he views Americans as "by nature inward-looking and aloof, only sporadically and spasmodically venturing forth into the world, usually in response to external attack or perceived threats." (5). The United States is clearly an ideological threat to the European monarchial powers and a territorial threat to Spain. The bluster of the Holy Alliance and the Monroe Doctrine, however, seem to dissipate fairly quickly after 1823 and the revival of European concerns in the late 19th century seem limited as the British move to a rapprochement with the United States which leaves only Tsarist Russia and Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany as leading critics of the United States. Kagan's brief discussions on China and Japan in the late 19th century suggest that neither perceived the U.S. as a danger.

6. Kagan's analysis of the relationship of slavery and foreign policy in Chapters 7-9 certainly integrates a number of issues that are treated separately and not linked together very much in the literature. Kagan emphasizes two increasingly distinct economic and social systems between North and South with different world views despite some areas of agreement. This perspective shapes Kagan's analysis of differing views of Jacksonian Democrats and Whigs, different perspectives on

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expansion and the Texas issue, on the application of the Monroe Doctrine, and on the meaning of Manifest Destiny. He depicts two distinct foreign policies aimed at each other. The North by the 1840s had turned to containment of the South and slavery—which Kapan compares with the U.S. in the Cold War—and the South pushed for the expansion of slavery to reduce the areas of freedom around the South.

7. Kagan engages the revisionists most directly on their home turf in the late 19th century build-up to overseas expansion. Walter LaFeber's *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (1963) leads the way joined by Edward Crapol's *America for Americans: Economic Nationalism and Anglophobia in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1973), Howard B. Schonberger's *Transportation to Seaboard: The Communication Revolution and American Foreign Policy, 1860-*1900(1971); Thomas J. McCormick's *China Market; America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893*-1901 (1967); and William A. Williams' *The Roots of the Modern American Empire; A Study in the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (1969) Kagan does not devote much attention to the economic transformation of the period, gives little weight to economic calculations being decisive on foreign policy decisions from the 1870s on, and notes considerable inconsistency in U.S. policies, both expansion and reaction, confidence and insecurity, and, above all, considerable political maneuvering by Democrats and Republicans in the 1880s. Kagan notes a growing U.S. desire to be a great power and follows this most closely through a discussion of the campaign to build a new navy.

8. Kagan concludes with the Cuban crisis in the 1890s and an evaluation of the handling of this crisis by Presidents Grover Cleveland and William McKinley. Into the cross-fire of historical interpretations, Kagan emphasizes the American public and McKinley's sense of outrage over Spanish policy in Cuba and a growing belief that the U.S. had the power and responsibility to do something about Cuba.: "It was not that McKinley wanted war, or the fruits of war, as part of some expansionist or imperialist design. He was not seeking to unite the country or strengthen its character through war. He was not trying to distract attention from economic difficulties at home by fighting a war abroad. He was not trying to fulfill some late-nineteenth-century ideal of masculinity or to save a decaying civilization by instilling 'barbarian virtues' through martial glory. He was not 'taking up the white man's burden' by intervening in Cuba; nor was he intervening in order to gain access to markets in East Asia. McKinley did not want war at all. But he was prepared to go to war if that was what was necessary to achieve what he regarded as a moral and humanitarian imperative." So McKinley actually meant what he said publicly.

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Kagan's sequel will have to follow this line further in the second volume as Teddy Roosevelt rushes to get the Rough Riders into Cuba, with or without their horses, and as Admiral Dewey steams with the Asian fleet for Manila in the Philippines.

—*Tom Maddux*

Robert Kagan is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund, and a columnist for *The Washington Post*. He is author of *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*, and editor, with William Kristol, of *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*. Kagan served in the U.S. State Department from 1984 to 1988. He lives in Brussels with his family.

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Review by William E. Weeks, University of California, San Diego

When Amazon.com advised me in October of the imminent publication of Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation*, I immediately placed my pre-order and anxiously awaited its arrival in the mail. Happily, *Dangerous Nation* was all that I anticipated and more. My thanks to Thomas Maddux of H-Diplo for the opportunity to participate in a roundtable on *Dangerous Nation* with such a distinguished panel of scholars.

William E. Weeks *received his Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego in 1986 and specializes in 19th century U.S. History at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of* John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire *(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992),* Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to Civil War *(1996) and, as a contributing editor, "Expansion into the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, 1815-1861,"* in American Foreign Relations since 1600: Guide to the Literature, 2nd edition *(2003). His work explores the relationship between American nationalism and American imperialism.*

In my view, *Dangerous Nation* is one of the most significant works on pre-20th century US foreign relations to appear in recent years. It makes a powerful case for the role of an expansionist liberal-capitalist ideology as a revolutionary force, perhaps the revolutionary force, in modern world history. It suggests that this revolutionary force, loosely termed "freedom," was, from the start, inherently expansionist. It rejects the traditional view that the US was isolationist, aloof, or otherwise withdrawn from world affairs, especially in the antebellum. Instead, Kagan portrays Americans as an aggressive, militaristic, expansionist people—a "dangerous nation"—driven by a particular conception of freedom and the way of life it entailed.

Kagan writes with a clear pedagogical purpose in mind—to better educate his fellow Americans, whom he believes lack an adequate understanding of their country's history, and more importantly, of their country's reactions in times of international crisis: "On balance, Americans would be better off if they understood themselves, their nation, and their nation's history better" which he suggests "applies especially to the early history of American foreign policy." (5) Kagan tells a "different story that is more about expansion and ambition, idealistic as well as materialistic, than about isolationist exemplars and cities upon hills." (6) Although firmly rooted in the historical scholarship of the period, Kagan's lucid style and broad focus makes *Dangerous Nation* accessible to more than just a scholarly audience. Indeed, by giving us a radically different foreign policy past, Kagan has opened the door to new perspectives on contemporary American foreign policy in both academia and the world at large.[1]

Kagan draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources in constructing his story. The sheer quantity of secondary sources (of both recent and older vintage) on the period

[1] See Max Boot's discussion of *Dangerous Nation* in, "Wilsonian—That's Us," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 October 2006.

means that his interpretation is to some degree is a synthesis of this work, yet the author has evolved a distinct view of the era that is greater than the sum of its parts. After lying more or less fallow for a generation, during the last fifteen years or so a substantial reevaluation of antebellum American foreign relations has occurred; *Dangerous Nation* may be seen as a culmination of this trend. It offers much to think about and debate. In this contribution, I want to comment on some aspects of the text and offer some specific criticisms and comment.

Kagan sees the origins of the American national project rooted in the speculative desires of colonial elites: "One can hardly exaggerate the extent to which American leaders, including future leaders of the independent republic had a direct, personal interest in this new phase of territorial expansion." (17) He asserts, "Mid-18th century Anglo-American thus became the most enthusiastic of British imperialists." (18) Kagan terms this group of Anglo-Americans and his first chapter 'the first imperialists." By the early 1750s, expansionist factions in Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts pushed for control of the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Kagan emphasizes that "Continued expansion [was] essential to the survival of the colonies and by extension the empire." (25). The failure of the individual colonies, even when supported by British regulars, to control the western territories, led to the formation of a proto-unionist faction (comprised of most notably Benjamin Franklin and George Washington) defined by their recognition that the colonies needed to act as one in matters of common interest, i.e., security and expansion.

The key events of 1754-1755—Washington's surprise attack on a French detachment at Jumonville Glen and subsequent defeat at Fort Necessity in 1754, the colonies unanimous rejection the same year of Franklin's Albany Plan of Union, and Braddock's disastrous defeat in western Pennsylvania the following year, seems to have been a key turning point in this movement toward unionism.[2] By 1755 it was clear that colonial union was an essential pre-condition of expansionist success. For Franklin, rejection of the Albany Plan led to a fruitless twenty-year effort to convince Parliament to impose a colonial union. Unlike the legislatures of virtually every colony, Franklin discerned the boundless potential synergies (to use a contemporary term) to be gained by placing the human and material resources of North America under a single political and economic regime. But to take advantage of these synergies required that each colony to concede some measure of its

[2] Recent books dealing in various ways with that crucial two-year period include Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Timothy J. Shannon, *Indians and Colonists at the Crossroads of Empire: The Albany Congress of 1754* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Matthew C. Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754-1765* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003); Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking, 2005); Fred Anderson, ed., *George Washington Remembers: Reflections on the French and Indian War* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); William M. Fowler, Jr., *Empires at War: The French and Indian War and the Struggle for North America, 1754-1763* (--2005).

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autonomy to a permanent union under a strong central authority. Franklin and Washington's visionary grasp of the possibilities of union are what makes them pre-eminent among the founding fathers.

Implicit in Kagan's work, and highly significant in my view, is that Franklin, Washington and others were imperialists before they were unionists, and unionists before they were nationalists, and all three before they were advocates of independence, which now seems best understood as an act of desperation resulting from London's failure to embrace colonial union. Certainly that is the impression one gets from Gordon Wood's recent book *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. It explains how someone who came so late to the cause of independence might nonetheless be properly seen as "the first American," as H.W. Brands terms him. Indeed, it now seems clear that the desire for empire is the chief motive for union, and that need for union was the chief motive for the construction of a distinct American nationality, as a means of conjuring support for that union. The key point to recall is that this emergent nationality was at first intended to occur within the context of the British Empire. In this regard it is not so much that Franklin came late to the cause of independence, but rather that the push for independence eventually came to the cause of union and unionists.

In this regard, *Dangerous Nation* understates the distinct and essential importance of the concept of union in American history. The practical advantages of union—security, expansion, and prosperity—make it both a precursor of and precondition to the idea of the nation. The John Quincy Adams quote from 1817 that gives the book its title suggests this relation; "The universal feeling of Europe in witnessing the gigantic growth of our population and power is that we shall, *if united* (my emphasis), become a very dangerous member of the society of nations." My point is that the most important concept in U.S. national history is union, and not other more noted phenomena such as republicanism or independence, for it is union as the preceding quotes suggest, that is the pre-condition for all the others. Republicanism, often treated by historians as an end unto itself, is better understood as a means to the end of union. And yet all too often the concept of union is taken for granted to the point of invisibility.

Casting Americans as more a nation of hungry speculators looking for the main chance than a commune of religious ascetics, Kagan argues that the Puritan influence on subsequent American foreign policy has been exaggerated. He instead suggests that "the society and culture that took root in the Chesapeake Bay region had far greater influence on the evolution of American society, and therefore on American foreign policy, than did Puritanism." (10) Rather than "isolationism and utopianism" or "cities upon hills and covenants with God" the expansionist impulse was rooted in "aggressive expansionism, acquisitive materialism, and an overarching ideology of civilization that encouraged and justified both." The author is right to move beyond the Puritan precedent when probing the sources of American nationalism but he underestimates the importance of evangelicalism in the national project. Material concerns may have been paramount but American expansionist ideology required a messianic dimension to give it legitimacy.

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Expansion in the name of security, expansion in the name of material success, expansion in the name of God—in the end these motives cannot be separated.

Kagan, echoing recent work by Fred Anderson, Andrew Cayton, John Grenier, and Max Boot views warfare as a major engine of historical change in American history.[3] Conflict bred conflict, and the establishment of security on one frontier merely set the stage for new conflicts on the new frontier. Kagan is unblinking in his assessment of this legacy: "In the 17th and 18th century, [the Anglo-Americans] purchased their security at the price of the insecurity, and often the ruin, of Pequot, Iroquois, and Narragansett, of French and Spaniards, and by the time of the Revolution, of the British, too." (12) Exterminating war against the native peoples of the continent was, as these works make clear, essential to the survival and success of the American experiment, and a critical cultural bonding agent in the formation of an American nationalism. But how many American today are ready to come to terms with the fact that the Indian name for George Washington—Caunotocarious—translates as "town devourer," and "town taker," as Fred Anderson reminds us in *George Washington Remembers*?[4] Understanding the role of exterminating warfare in the early days of the republic may cast new light on more recent events. Perhaps Hiroshima and Nagasaki are best understood as very large Indian villages, whose utter destruction without regard to age, sex, or physical condition was designed to overawe and compel submission in much the same way as Washington's campaigns against the Indians in upstate New York in 1778.

Dangerous Nation portrays an expansionist tide driven by waves of settlers under the spell of the chance to get rich, a critical aspect of the creation of the U.S. as "the world's first modern commercial, liberal republic." Drawing on work of Gordon Wood, Kagan emphasizes the revolutionary nature of liberated capitalist desire. Portraying westward moving Americans as so many tips of the liberal-capitalist spear, expansionism brought a seeming wilderness under the dictates of a market economy. Although Kagan notes that "it was speculators who bought and sold the land. It was this advance guard of the liberal order that made American territorial conquests both irresistible and permanent" he recognizes that the Federal government provided essential military, diplomatic, and at times, financial support to this movement.

In this context, Indian dispossession, whatever the humanitarian concerns voiced by certain Americans, became inevitable. This was owing in part to the fact the federal government feared losing the support its citizens if it pushed too hard to defend the rights of Native Americans, many of whom expected governmental support for their expansionist endeavors. Ultimately, appeals to notions of progress and civilization prompted even those sympathetic to the Indians, such as John Quincy Adams, to back removal.

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[3] See Anderson, *Crucible of War*; Anderson and Cayton, *Dominion of War*; John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American Warmaking on the Frontier* (2005); Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power (*2003).

[4] See Anderson, ed., *Washington Remembers*, 118. See also Glenn F. Williams, *Year of the Hangman: George Washington's Campaign Against the Iroquois* (New York: Westholme Publishing, 2005).

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Kagan portrays the breakneck expansionism of the pre-1820 period as a yeasty combination of ambition and opportunism: "This was not an empire acquired in a fit of absentmindedness, but neither was it acquired by careful design. Each acquisition brought a new horizon and new ambitions. The fulfillment of one desire produced another. Perhaps the most accurate description was that it was an empire attained by determined opportunism." (137) Although there may not have been a master plan of expansion per se there was a master ideology of liberal capitalism tied to an expansionist imperative that drove the foreign policy of the era; the core of internal American politics was determining the exact direction and speed at which the expansion would occur.

On a related point: the preceding quote is the closest Kagan comes to terming the United States an "empire." Notwithstanding the effusion of texts from across the political spectrum that use the term American Empire it remains an ideological hot button and Kagan resists pushing it. Yet can anyone read the *Dangerous Nation's* narrative of relentless territorial, commercial, and above all, ideological expansion and not think of the United States as an empire, albeit one unlike any other in history?

By 1825, Kagan sees the US on the road to supremacy in the Western Hemisphere and verging on global power, only to be stopped not by external factors but internal divisions over the question of slavery. Kagan pulls no punches about the critical role divisions over slavery played in the collapse of the union, particularly after 1820. Divisions over the nature of American freedom gave the nation "split personality" combining "a principled commitment to human equality and natural rights as embodied in the Declaration of Independence, and a practical commitment to the defense of the institution of slavery as embodied in the Constitution." (182) He argues, "For American slaveholders, no 'national interest' was more vital than the prevention of a domestic slave uprising." (183) Kagan, no doubt to the consternation of neo-confederates, sees the slaveholding elite as the nation's Achilles heel, both ideologically and morally; their narrow minded particularism lead to growth of two nations and two foreign policies. The breakdown of the expansionist consensus foreshadowed the breakdown of the union. In end, he suggests that there was not one manifest destiny but two, and that they increasingly clashed after 1820.

Kagan is especially vivid in portraying the nature of the slavery issue as a foreign policy question. From the Missouri crisis on, foreign policy matters, such as the Panama Congress of 1826, were intensely scrutinized for their potential impact on slavery and slaveholders. Kagan is unsparing in his depiction of the Old South as a repository of repression and fear increasingly at odds with the North's evolving notion of freedom. "Like other quasi-totalitarian regimes in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the South's paranoia led it naturally toward expansion and conquest as means of eliminating threats posed by free territories on its borders." (213) In the end, the author seems to agree with Lincoln that the continued existence of slavery compromised the meaning of America. Slavery's downfall (later lamented by Hitler, as Kagan notes) was the precondition for future American greatness.

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And yet Kagan's own argument suggests that the South's fear of encirclement was not paranoid. He describes Northern efforts to cut off the spread of slavery into the territories as a form of containment, and a precursor to the anti-communist policies of the Cold War. Moreover, he makes it clear that the British, too, were attempting to stop the spread of slavery via efforts to acquire Texas. In short, the white South felt encircled by free labor societies (British and American) because they were encircling it. Kagan blames Polk's aggressive expansionist diplomacy for aggravating partisan differences and hastening the Civil War. Indeed, Kagan frankly acknowledges that the huge Civil War death toll must be understood at least in part as the delayed cost of expansionism. Ultimately, Kagan agrees with the assessment of John Keegan and others that the Civil War was the great ideological struggle in American history, a crusade to define what America truly stood for. The union had to be preserved, if only as incubator of the freedom that the nation represented.

Kagan, much to my satisfaction, portrays John Quincy Adams as both one of the major architects of the evolving notion of American freedom and, by extension, American foreign policy, and also as the guiding light for what was to become the reigning ideology of the Republican party of William Seward and Abraham Lincoln. Adams's historical reputation has been steadily rising for almost twenty years, chiefly owing to the distinctive understanding that he gave to the idea of American freedom. Adams has emerged as the most important figure in the development of American nationalist ideology between the founders and Lincoln, more so than even Jackson.

By emphasizing the central importance of expansionism, *Dangerous Nation* makes a major contribution to an enlarged understanding of U.S. history. Kagan's narrative vividly illustrates the fine line between internal and external, foreign and domestic in American history, especially as concerns the question of race. It has long been said that foreign policy is a function of domestic politics, but *Dangerous Nation* shows how the reverse of that is also true—that domestic controversies are themselves often influenced by matters beyond the nation's borders. *Dangerous Nation* suggests that the nation's political boundaries are best understood not as a solid barrier but rather as a semi-permeable membrane through which people, ideas, and power can flow bi-directionally. The book is a step in the direction of framing "foreign relations"—that is to say, the sum total of interactions and influences of America and Americans outside the nation's political boundaries-- as essential to the study of American "domestic" history, rather than as the unwanted and neglected stepchild it too often is treated as.

Kagan's careful and cumulative case for the central importance of ideology as the most important factor in the formation of American foreign policy reaches a climax in his explanation of the causes of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. In recent years it has been an article of faith among many in the profession that economic motives must have been controlling in the march to war; Kagan convincingly argues that reports of Spanish atrocities, not all of them exaggerated, pricked the conscience of Americans and created

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widespread sentiment for a humanitarian intervention based on the presumption of their own collective goodness that, in the end, McKinley could not resist.

Dangerous Nation's thesis that ideology drove American foreign policy from at least the War of 1812 onward would, at first glance, appear to be a significant challenge to those, chiefly on the left, who argue for the primacy of economic motives. And yet Kagan's narrative amply demonstrates that American nationalist/expansionist ideology was suffused with economic motives and ambitions far grander than any one economic interest or collection of economic interests at any given time and locale. More broadly, historians might reflect on whether or not an ideological motive is necessarily any less imperial than an economic one. A nation conceiving of itself as uniquely favored by God and destined to remake the world in a manner similar to itself, and which saw its values as synonymous with all that was good and progressive is at once more fascinating and more frightening than one motivated by mere profit. Robert Kagan has given us a new and in many ways, transformative look at pre 20th century American foreign policy. We can eagerly await volume two, dealing with the 20th century, of his history of American foreign policy

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Review by Frederick Marks III

Are democratic governments any less prone to aggression than absolutist ones? Judging from what Robert Kagan has to say, the answer would appear to be "no" since Americans, from the beginning, were about as imperialistic as it was possible for a people to be.

Dangerous Nation is a readable but highly selective survey of American foreign policy from colonial times to 1900. There is virtually nothing on Civil War diplomacy or Commodore Perry's opening of Japan. The Samoan Crisis of 1885 and the Chilean set-to of 1892 occupy more space than events leading up to the Mexican War (which Lincoln and the first Roosevelt regarded as highway robbery), and the story of relations with the Indians of North America does not extend much beyond 1800.

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Kagan views American expansion prior to 1800 as more harmful to native American interests than French colonialism because the French were less acquisitive, and by his estimate, such expansion was also inevitable owing to the fact that the government "risked losing popular support if it hemmed in its citizens" (75). Kagan shows how land speculation involving not only the Ohio Company but also the Loyal Land Company, and not only George Washington, but also Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and other luminaries, added a pecuniary motive to territorial covetousness. Conspicuously absent from subscriber lists, as he says, were the names of the Indians "who actually dwelled on the lands that the colonists and their imperial backers were granting to themselves" (18).

To the Indians, as well as to the French and Spanish, the history of British colonialism was one of continual aggression. Kagan notes that in 1754, when Washington rode west to erect a fort in French-controlled territory along the Ohio River, his mission resulted in the murder and mutilation of the French commander. Americans massacred the Pequots and signed treaties with other Indian tribes that were "no more than a consolidation" of gains "before the onward press of the expanding population broke through to the next frontier" (79). Catherine the Great, aptly quoted by Kagan, spoke for many an American when she remarked, "I have no way to defend my borders but to expand them."

The author reveals that by 1776, the American colonies already enjoyed a higher standard of living than the mother country. Small wonder, then, that they were regarded overseas with a mixture of awe, jealousy, and fear.

Kagan duly notes the improvised nature of American policy. World conquest was envisaged, but only on the ideological level, and there was never a grand strategy for remaking the world along liberal democratic lines. He is quite right, too, in maintaining that genuine humanitarian concerns, rather than imperialism or "yellow press" journalism, brought on the war with Spain. By 1898, Madrid's failed policy had resulted in what "some would call a genocide" (390).

Another theme developed skillfully and at length is the extent to which slavery influenced American foreign policy from 1850 to 1898. By dividing North and South and polarizing the Democratic Party, it put a definite damper on expansionism. John Quincy Adams hesitated to bring Texas into the Union, Hawaiian statehood was deferred, the annexation of Santo Domingo was put off, and all because of the fear of the spread of slavery. "The United States could not expand," Kagan observes, "because it could not decide what kind of nation it wished to be. . . . sectional conflict *was* America's foreign policy" (201, 203).

Southerners and their allies in the Democratic Party tended to oppose foreign intervention because expressions of moral purpose abroad might have untoward repercussions at home. According to Kagan, this is why postwar Democrats like Richard Olney viewed the Monroe Doctrine with suspicion and sought to forestall its use as a blank check. Olney, who is often portrayed as bombastically aggressive, is shown here to have actually limited the scope of the Doctrine, declaring that the United States would not intervene in hemispheric affairs without a credible threat of extra-hemispheric territorial aggrandizement.

If there is a conceptual weakness in *Dangerous Nation*, it lies in Kagan's assumption that late nineteenth century opponents of a stronger navy "were right to predict that increasing American naval power would increase the chances that this new power would someday be used" (356). This is an old chestnut that flies in the face of established facts. Theodore Roosevelt, who presided over the largest peacetime naval expansion in United States history, spent seven years in the White House without firing a single shot at a foreign foe. Woodrow Wilson, on the other hand, who allowed the armed services to languish, took his country to war because Germany was convinced that she could sink American ships and American nationals with impunity. Likewise in the case of Franklin Roosevelt who opposed meaningful defense expenditure during the mid-1930s, both at home and in England. World War II was not long in coming, and Japan felt confident enough to take on the "sleeping giant."

One can go further. Washington, Eisenhower, and Reagan, who spent heavily on defense, were peace presidents. Reagan, in particular, is remembered for his 600 ship navy, B-1 bomber, and Strategic Defense Initiative, all of which were instrumental in ending the Cold War.

Stepping back in time and comparing Jefferson with Monroe, the pattern remains the same. The sage of Monticello dismantled a powerful navy, and within months he was embroiled in hostilities. James Monroe, who presided over an arms buildup following the War of 1812,

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compiled one of history's most brilliant foreign policy records, and he was forthright about methodology: "An efficient commerce and a growing navy are my pillars of peace."

Kagan is mistaken on three other points as well. First, he leads the reader to believe that Jefferson's war against the Barbary pirates was successful when, in fact, it was an embarrassing failure. Four hundred American sailors were taken prisoner—the equivalent in today's terms of 40,000—and in the end, Jefferson had to eat humble pie, resuming annual tribute to the pirates and paying a hefty ransom for the return of captives. The War of 1812 forced the nation into high military gear, enabling Commodores Bainbridge and Decatur to make headway in pirate-ravaged waters. Still, it was only when a combined Anglo-Dutch naval force demolished the Algerine fleet, along with a substantial portion of Algiers, that the Algerines were forced to pay an indemnity and American Mediterranean shipping could proceed apace.

Secondly, Kagan describes Spain as "at most a wary ally" in the War for Independence (55). Wary she was, but her role militarily was nothing short of indispensable. Her victories against Britain in North American and elsewhere, coupled with the enormous pressure she brought to bear against Gibraltar and the English homeland (attempting invasions against both) were just as important as anything accomplished by Lafayette, Rochambeau, or de Grasse.

Thirdly, Theodore Roosevelt was not a knee-jerk expansionist, as Kagan implies (370, 387, 400). TR's acute sense of the need for proportion between ends and means curbed his "Rough Rider" instincts, and the territorial growth of the United States during his presidency proved minimal.

My greatest surprise in reading *Dangerous Nation* was to find Kagan so much in tune with American attitudes. On the one hand, he appears to believe it wrong for Americans to have dismissed Hispanics as hot-blooded and violent (351), targeting them for what C. Vann Woodward terms the "political and ideological submission that Americans were especially inclined to impose" (359). He likewise scores Americans for subscribing to the Black Legend interpretation of Spanish colonialism (379). On the other hand, he himself alleges that centuries of Spanish oppression, barbarism, and cruelty damaged the Latin character (379); and while he states that "'civilize' by conquest" was the Anglo-Saxon attitude toward Indians, Frenchmen, and Spaniards, as it had been toward Welshmen, Irishmen, and Scots, he ignores the fact that Anglo-Saxon slave owners were far less humane than their Latin counterparts in the way they treated their slaves. Similarly, Anglo-Saxon laws against inter-racial marriage, which would have been unthinkable in Madrid or Paris, are passed over in silence.

Kagan writes well and has a knack for making his audience sit up and think. Readers will therefore look forward to the publication of a second volume. It is to be hoped, though, that in the next round, Kagan will be thoroughly candid. Americans are viewed by many in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia as academically inferior, and with good reason.

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Although Harvard, MIT, and other American research institutions are indisputably distinguished, the United States ranks close to the bottom of the industrialized world in terms of educational achievement, and this holds true even when gifted students form the sole basis for comparison. Americans are also widely regarded as morally inferior judging from comparative statistics on abortion, illegitimacy, porn consumption, and marital breakdown.

Kagan does a creditable job of showing why the United States was dangerous in its formative years and how this danger registered on the minds of foreigners. But, as he puts together a second volume, his challenge will be different because the danger is different. American aggression at the moment is primarily cultural. A wealthy Uncle Sam is seen to offer foreign aid and other inducements to governments willing to promote practices regarded by their people as immoral. Will Americans minimize the resentment aroused by such policy? Will they shrug off charges of complicity with the devil as so much "fundamentalist" cant? Clearly, if an unclouded mirror is to be held up before the eyes of the American people and if they are to be spared the hubris that leads to self-destruction, there is work to be done.

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Review by James E. Lewis, Jr., Kalamazoo College

Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation* is a massive undertaking. He tackles nearly three centuries of American history, from the earliest colonies to the eve of the Spanish-American War. Aware that the lines between foreign and domestic were rarely clear, he includes not only many of the key events, individuals, and themes of American diplomatic history, but also some measure of American political, economic, and even social history, as well. And he considers both how Americans understood their own place in the world and how this dynamic and evolving place was understood by others.

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With so many scholarly books and articles competing for our limited reading time, though, why would academic historians invest such a precious resource in a work of popular history--a work written for a popular rather than a scholarly audience and based largely or exclusively on secondary source research? What do and should we expect from such works? With over four hundred pages of text and nearly one hundred additional pages of notes and bibliography, *Dangerous Nation* raises these questions with some force.

At a minimum, it seems to me, popular histories should be reliable. In popular as in scholarly histories, frequent errors in such basic facts as names and dates fatally compromise a book. For the most part, *Dangerous Nation* avoids such errors. Kagan does refer to Gabriel's Rebellion as the "Prosser Gabriel slave rebellion" (p. 183)—reviving and reversing a name, Gabriel Prosser, that most scholars rejected years ago. But such errors are rare. Far more common are points where I would challenge his understanding of an event or reading of a document (most of which he seems to have seen only as quoted in secondary works, even when they are readily available in published collections); others certainly might interpret these events and documents as he does, however. A more troubling problem is Kagan's clumsy integration of primary and secondary source quotes into his own text, which frequently makes it appear that a historical figure wrote or said something that was actually written by a historian (see, for example, the paragraph beginning "Monroe believed . . ." on page 172, in which what appears to be a quote from James Monroe is, in fact, a quote from Ernest R. May). Compounding this problem are the decisions—standard for popular histories and probably made by the publisher not the author—to use block citations rather than separate citations and endnotes rather than footnotes, both of which make it more difficult to sort out precisely who said what.

If the standards should be similar for popular and academic works when it comes to basic, factual reliability, they should be somewhat different on stylistic matters. Sadly, scholarly works do not consistently display the careful crafting and precise polishing that make for a truly engaging book. Relieved of the arduous duty of extensive primary source research, however, popular historians should have more time to craft and polish their prose. Writing for a popular audience, moreover, it is probably more necessary for them to engage their readers as much with their prose style as with their arguments and information. I would hardly call *Dangerous Nation* scintillating in stylistic terms and it includes some real clunkers, such as a reference to "Puritan America as a pious Greta Garbo" (p. 8). But the chronological structure is effective, if unimaginative, and the jargon-free writing is clear. As such, the book is at least no worse than the common run of academic writing in stylistic terms.

If popular historians are largely freed from any expectation of primary source research, they certainly need to be both up-to-date and comprehensive in their secondary source reading. Kagan set a monumental task for himself—synthesizing and explaining nearly three centuries of American foreign affairs and policies. SHAFR's recent *Guide to American Foreign Relations Since 1600* identifies more than three thousand books and articles that might be relevant to his project, not including either primary sources or reference works; even that volume, moreover, lacks most works published after 2000 (and there have been a number of important books and articles in recent years).[1] Obviously, no one could be expected to read all of those works. But, if scholars are going to invest our time in reading a popular history, we should reasonably expect that it would engage with and respond to some of the most important issues raised by scholarly works. In this area, *Dangerous Nation* falls woefully short. There are some efforts to grapple with recent scholarly developments, including an intriguing chapter on "The Foreign Policy of Slavery." But large sections of this book revisit scholarly debates of twenty, thirty, or even forty years ago—"republicanism" vs. "liberalism" and "realism" vs. "idealism," in particular. At the same time, Kagan neglects many of the central issues of recent scholarship—the importance of federalism, the formation of national identity, and the impact of local interests on policymaking—and slights others--international cultural and commercial exchanges, Native American policies and relations, and filibustering. If you are a historian of twentieth century diplomacy who hoped that one book could bring you back up to date on scholarship concerning pre-1898 American foreign relations, you will need to search elsewhere. *Dangerous Nation* would lead you to think that little had been done on much of this period since that graduate seminar you took in the mid-'80s (even the mid-'70s, in some chapters).

Finally, if popular histories—or works of synthesis, more broadly—are going to merit a scholar's time and attention, they should have something new to say. We hope that the fresh eyes of those outside the academy and the broad vision that is presumably lost

[1] See Robert L. Beisner, ed., *Guide to American Foreign Relations Since 1600*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2003), Volume 1, chapters 3-10.

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through too much attention to documents and details can suggest new ways of making sense of the past that have eluded us. In terms of its major arguments, however, *Dangerous Nation* says little that will be new to scholars of American foreign affairs. His sweeping narrative shows Americans as a "dangerous nation," beginning even before they were an independent one. Their aggressiveness took numerous forms—territorial, commercial, and ideological—and ultimately left few within or beyond their borders untouched. By deploying such guarded phrases as "most Americans today" and "Or so it is widely believed" (p. 3) on the opening page of the book, Kagan leaves little doubt that he understands that scholars already know and accept much of what follows. They hardly need to be told that Americans were active, even aggressive, on the international stage in various ways long before 1898.

If Kagan's main argument is familiar, however, some of his secondary arguments are more interesting or more valuable. One thing that he does well, though intermittently, is discuss how the rest of the world viewed the United States. In particular, he demonstrates that, even before American independence, there was a widespread recognition of the danger that Americans could pose, first, to the colonies, land, and trade of their neighbors and, later, to the political, diplomatic, and economic order that had been established within and among Europe's Great Powers. It is in the writings of these amazed and often alarmed diplomats, officials, and travelers that Kagan's presentation of Americans as a "dangerous nation" acquires real solidity. Another thing of value in this book is Kagan's consistent recognition of the artificiality of a division between domestic and foreign policy. He traces the indivisibility of foreign and domestic principally to the nation's political system; with all power derived from and dependent upon the people, U.S. policymakers simply could not act with the freedom or authority of their European counterparts. The implications of this understanding are not traced as far or as fully as they might be, but it is an important point that is still sometimes lost in writing about American diplomacy.

Ultimately, *Dangerous Nation* is probably more impressive in its ambition than its achievement. There is no question that it is a huge undertaking and Kagan certainly deserves our respect for that effort. But it is one of those "big" books in which the author's coverage of topics that you do not know well can seem fresh or thought-provoking, while his discussion of topics that you do know well often seems stale or even problematic. I certainly doubt that many scholars of American foreign relations will find its central argument even remotely new; but I also doubt that we make up much of his intended audience. Kagan's goal is to dispel "the pervasive myth of America as isolationist and passive until provoked" (p. 6)—not a "myth" that has many adherents in the scholarly community. Whether a four-hundred-page book can reach a large enough audience to achieve the goal of dispelling popular myths in any meaningful way is questionable. But there are certainly individuals making important decisions about U.S. foreign policy who would, as Kagan correctly notes of Americans in general, "be better off if they understood themselves, their nation, and their nation's history better" (p. 6); in fact, we might all be "better off" if at least those individuals found the time to read this book.

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